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ABSTRACT

Described is a program designed to provide appropriate teaching materials and strategies for learning disabled students in regular classrooms. The program is explained to include special education resource teachers, a learning materials center, and pre-planned self-instructional learning packages, with the goal of supporting and complementing the regular classroom program. The program is said to be based in two major centers of activity: the local school where resource teachers design, prescribe, and order instructional programs; and the consolidated materials center where the staff develops instructional packages for classroom use. Advantages of this model are seen to include its practicality and the provision of individualized instruction. (Author/CL)

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ACCELERATED LEARNING:

A STRATEGY FOR THE INSTRUCTION OF PUPILS WITH LEARNING DISABILITIES IN THE REGULAR CLASSROOM

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CURRENT PRACTICE

The system of Accelerated Learning has grown out of a desire to improve the effectiveness of mainstreaming programs. After several years of mainstreaming experience, it has become apparent that good intentions have often exceed technological skills. It appears that although integrated instruction may be as effective as segregated instruction it is still far from adequate or efficient.

The needs of many learning disabled students exceed the available time and resources of the typical special education support system. Advances must be made in the methods and strategies of special instruction if special education is to meet the growing demand for special assistance.

An examination of the content of special instruction reveals one of the current limitations in the practice of special assistance to learning disabled students in regular classrooms. Most resource programs concentrate on the basic skills of reading and arithmetic and neglect the areas of cognitive development that are found in language arts, social studies, and science (Guerin, 1974). The cognitive areas, however, constitute the major part of the regular classroom day in those grades above the primary level. It is in these areas that the student experiences success or failure and it is in these areas that the student is expected to act with independence and self reliance. Yet, little if anything is done to assure the student of success in major portions of his school day.

An examination of the system for delivering services to the special student provides a partial explanation for the limited focus of instruction and reveals a second major limitation in contemporary programs. In most programs the special student is removed from the classroom for remedial or supplementary instruction. Special assistance tends to focus on the basic disfunctions and does little to interface with the daily activities of the classroom teacher. Support is given the child, little help is given to his regular teacher, and the effect of the special intervention is marginal.

NEW STRATEGY

It is the purpose of Accelerated Learning to provide mainstreamed special education pupils with appropriate instructional materials and teaching strategies where and when they are needed. Each of the separate elements of the system is a useful adjunct to a special education program. It is, however, the combination of the elements into an overall delivery system that results in a truely responsive and individualized program for special pupils. The identification of pupil and teacher needs, the preparation of materials and strategies, and the delivery and monitoring of instruction are designed to serve both special pupils and their regular teachers.

In this program, the special teacher maximizes the learning that takes place in the regular classroom. Supplementary assistance compliments regular teaching programs and acknowledges that the regular teacher's instructional style and content are central factors in classroom learning. Supplementary support provides a bridge between teaching practices and learning styles. Thus, the role of the special teacher is to assure pupil success in the regular classroom and to provide remedial assistance.

At the core of the program, is a process for determining pupil and teacher needs, translating those needs into strategies and materials, and implementing the appropriate instruction. The goal of the process is to significantly improve special pupils' ability to participate and to learn within regular classrooms. The method employed involves packaging individualized instruction so that it is both appropriate to the child and compatible with the classroom program.

Accelerated Learning can accomodate pupil needs in a single subject area, in multiple subject areas or in all the subject areas taught in a school day. In the programs simplest form, a single special education teacher operating in isolation from other special teachers and without an instructional support unit, provides packaged classroom instruction for special pupils. In the more comprehensive form many special teachers, supported by a consolidated materials center, prescribe and order individualized packages from the center and monitor this supplementary classroom instruction.

The program has two major centers of activity. There are resource teachers at the local schools who determine the needs of the pupil and his teacher, match those needs with appropriate materials and strategies, request individualized programs and monitor the instruction. An instructional support unit, the consolidated materials center, provides the material resources needed to fill the wide variety of instructional demands and prepares individual teaching units. The process is represented in Figure 1.

INSTRUCTION

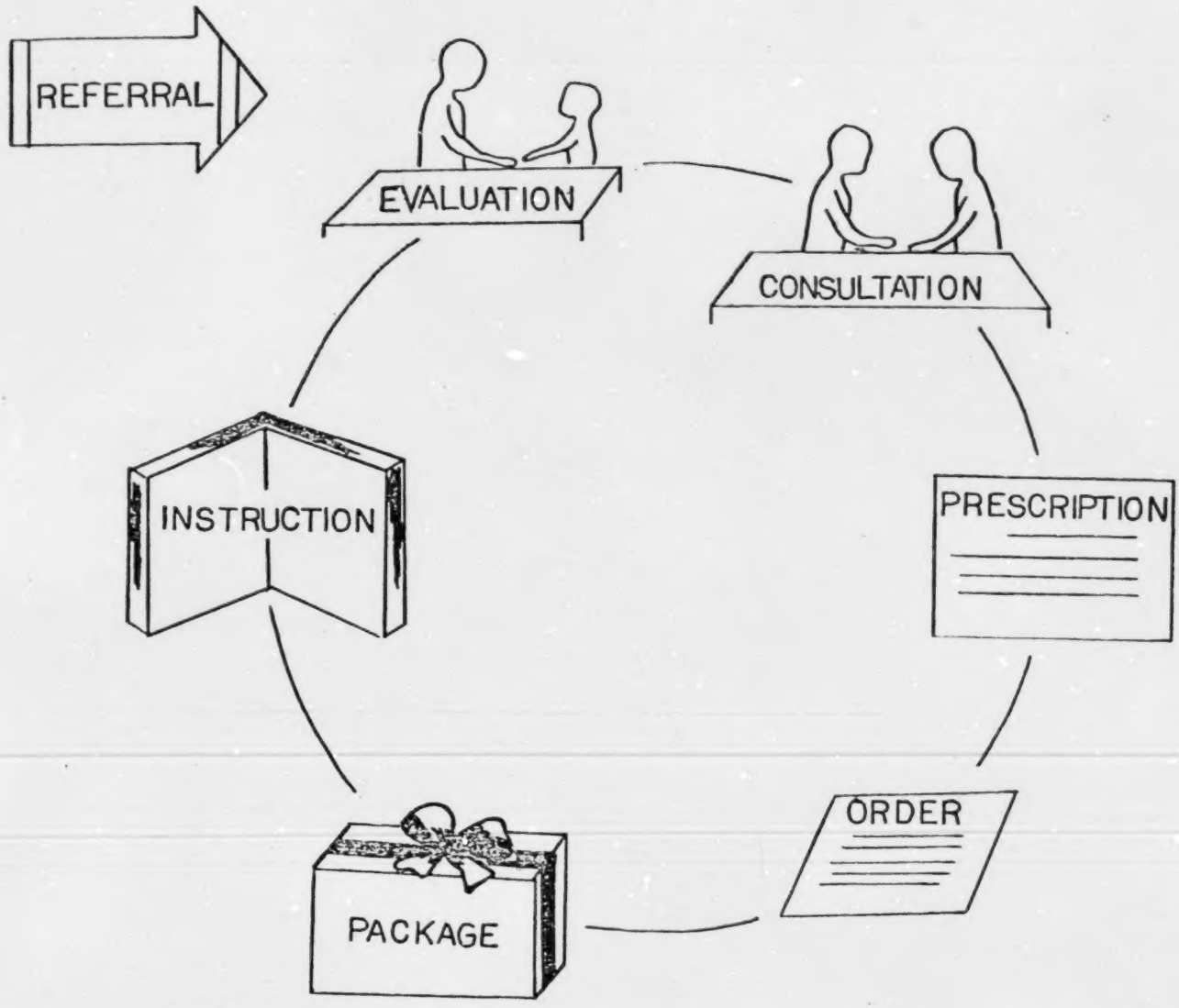
The process involves two major components, instruction and support. Instruction involves the elements of evaluation, consultation, prescription, ordering and teaching. Since the underlying purpose of Accelerated Learning is the improvement of the in-classroom and supplementary instruction of the student each activity contains a focus on both the child and the setting. The first two elements are highly interrelated and involve joint decisions between teachers that lead to the prescription. Ordering is the act of communicating the decision to a support unit which in turn translates the request into an instructional package. The form of teaching can vary widely from self instruction to tutorial assistance.

Evaluation and assessment activities focus both on the skills and needs of the student and the teaching styles, goals and needs of the teacher. Figure 2 represents the interrelatedness of the student and the teacher within the instructional setting.

A large variety of formal and informal assessment strategies are employed. Norm reference tests provide comparative student data, and criterion reference instruments relate directly to classroom interventions. Skill level and diagnostic tests are or can be coded to available instructional procedures and materials.

Figure 1

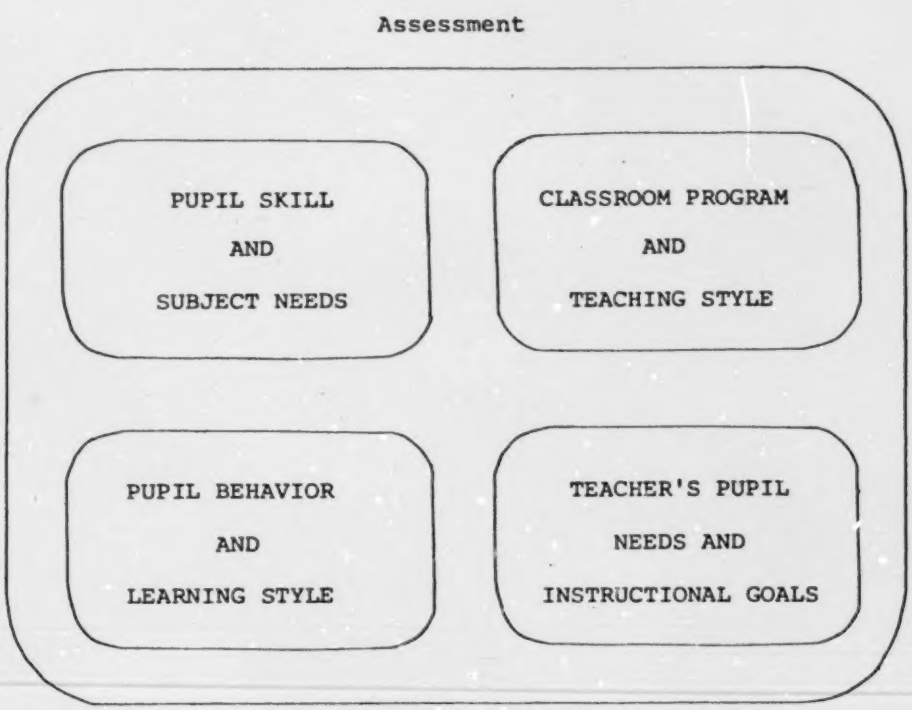
THE PROCESS



Other methods of evaluation are equally useful and are helpful in determining the most appropriate interventions. Class observations, student work samples, task analysis, and behavioral analysis are some of the informal methods that help to describe the child in his setting. Pupil selected priorities, teachers determined goals and parental concerns provide clues as to areas where there is likely to be agreements on the need for assistance.

Figure 2

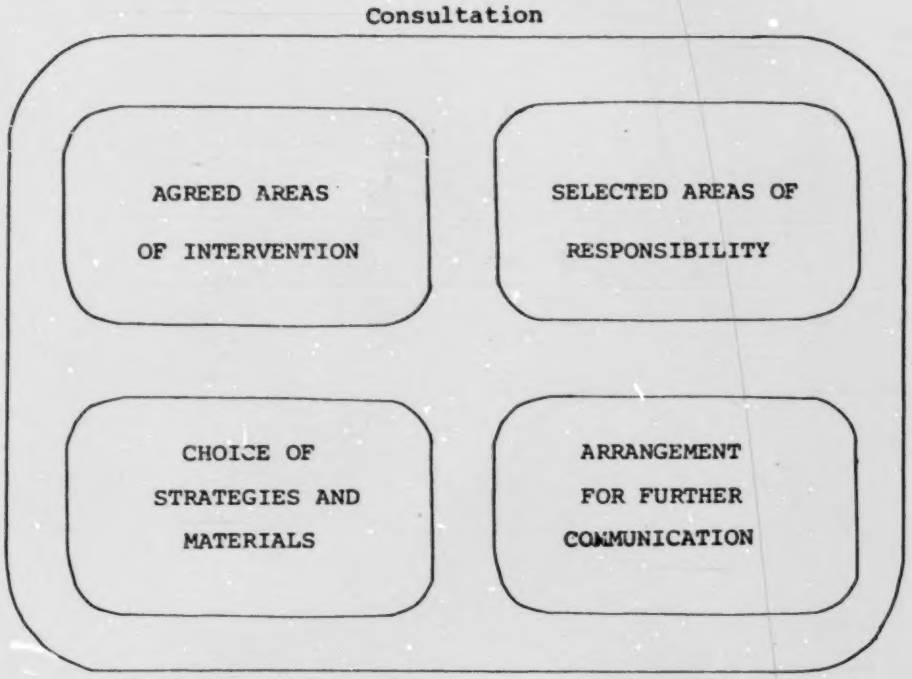
ACCELERATED LEARNING


Assessment
PUPIL SKILL AND SUBJECT NEEDS
CLASSROOM PROGRAM AND TEACHING STYLE
PUPIL BEHAVIOR AND LEARNING STYLE
TEACHER'S PUPIL NEEDS AND INSTRUCTIONAL GOALS

Consultation is perhaps the most critical element in the success of an in-classroom program. A level of cooperation between the teachers is essential to the implementation of a supportive intervention. Several of the important factors that form the agreement between the regular and special teacher are identified in Figure 3.

Figure 3

ACCELERATED LEARNING



While the interaction between the teachers is often in the form of a discussion where information and concerns are shared, the result of the conversation(s) is a type of agreement or contract. The level of clarity and acceptance of this agreement influences the ultimate success of the program. A strong agreement with clearly defined goals and responsibilities has the greatest chance for success.

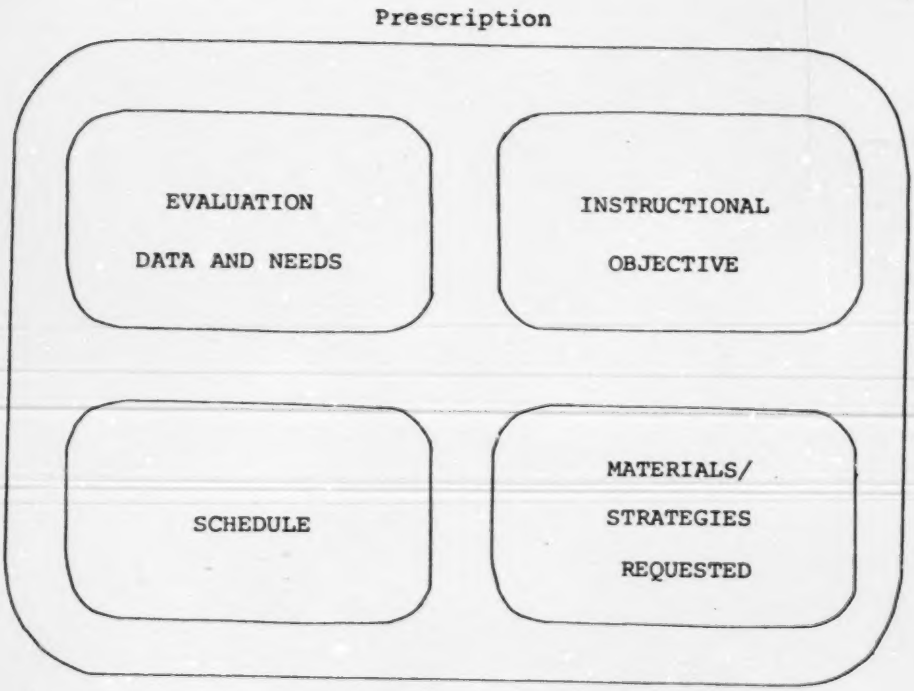
Experience has demonstrated that the more compatible the strategies and materials are with the regular teachers existing style, the more likely the success of the support service. It is the role of the special teacher to match what "works best" with the child with what "works best" for the teacher. Traditionally, the resource teacher has selected methods that she likes best and that she believes will assist the pupil. Within the Accelerated Learning model, the match is between the student's needs and those of his regular teacher. This means that the special teacher must have a variety of approaches and materials available in order to fit the many teaching styles and pupil needs.

The student is also consulted in this procedure in order to determine his preference for the areas of concentration and the method of instruction. Student participation helps to assure a level of acceptance and involvement. Participation also allows the student to share the responsibility for the success or failure of the procedure.

The package prescription is written only after teacher agreement is reached. The prescription includes the statement of the evaluation data, the instructional objections, the types of materials to be included and the schedule for delivery. Figure 4 represents the major data included on the prescription.

Figure 4

ACCELERATED LEARNING



The Data on the prescription is provided to the consolidated materials to be used as a reference for later orders. Center personnel can use this information to suggest alternate materials to the special teacher and to make sure that materials provided in the cognitive areas are at appropriate skill (reading) levels. Prescription data requires only periodic updating while orders may be placed frequently.

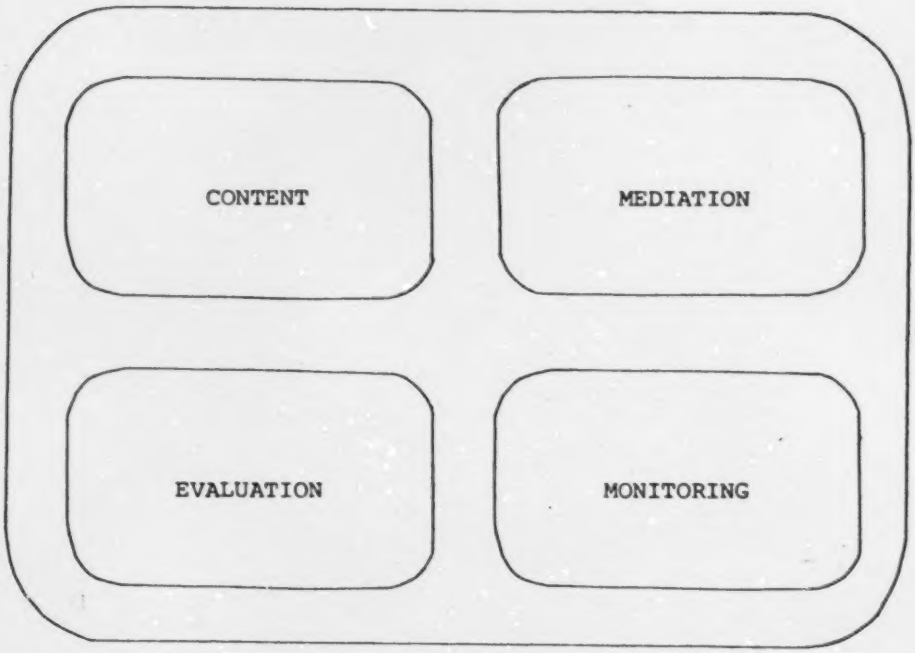
Ordering involves a request from the special education teacher to her support unit. This could be as informal as directions to volunteers and as formal as a written request on specially prepared forms that are then sent to a materials center. Important items of information are the pupils name and location, subject area, the reference to the prescription page, any other identifying data and the directions to the support personnel.

Instruction (teaching) can be carried out in at least three different ways. The child can function in the classroom with packaged instruction that is supervised either by the classroom teacher or the resource teacher. The child can complete part of the packaging the regular classroom has and meet with the special teacher outside the room to review and update the work. The child can also work on the package and be seen for other instruction in a special education center in either a tutorial or small group situation.

The teachers responsibility for the supervision of packaged instruction is determined at the time that the package is ordered. The special teacher monitors the progress and makes changes when necessary. The elements of instruction are represented in Figure 5.

Figure 5

ACCELERATED LEARNING



SUPPORT

The support component in Accelerated Learning is provided by a consolidated materials center. The Center houses the materials and equipment used by all special education teachers in a particular geographic or district area. Each teacher maintains at the school site a simple, basic supply of those materials necessary for daily instruction; all other materials are drawn from a pool maintained at the Center.

The advantages of the Center are numerous:

Greater variety and range of materials.

Thorough coverage of materials over all grades and disabilities.

Materials for low incidence needs.

Immediate availability of materials when need arises.

Wider use of existing materisls.

Planned purchase of materials based on anticipation rather than crises.

Current and on-going inventory of materials.

Organization for ready access and retrieval of materials.

Systematic review of materials.

Exposure to new materials and strategies.

Center for professional activities.

Reduction in duplication of materials.

While the logic behind the consolidation of materials and resources is overwhelming, there are realistic reasons why some teachers hesitate to make this commitment. Among a few of the objections:

> Many teachers have gone for years with very few supplies and now that they have accumulated a reserve, they are fearful of losing them and beginning again
>
> Teachers are fearful that they will not have access to the posted supples when they need them
>
> Previous experiences with curriculum centers has demonstrated a lack of responsiveness to teachers needs.

The concerns of teachers both help to explain teacher's reluctance to participate and provide clues to the potential hazards of centralized housing.

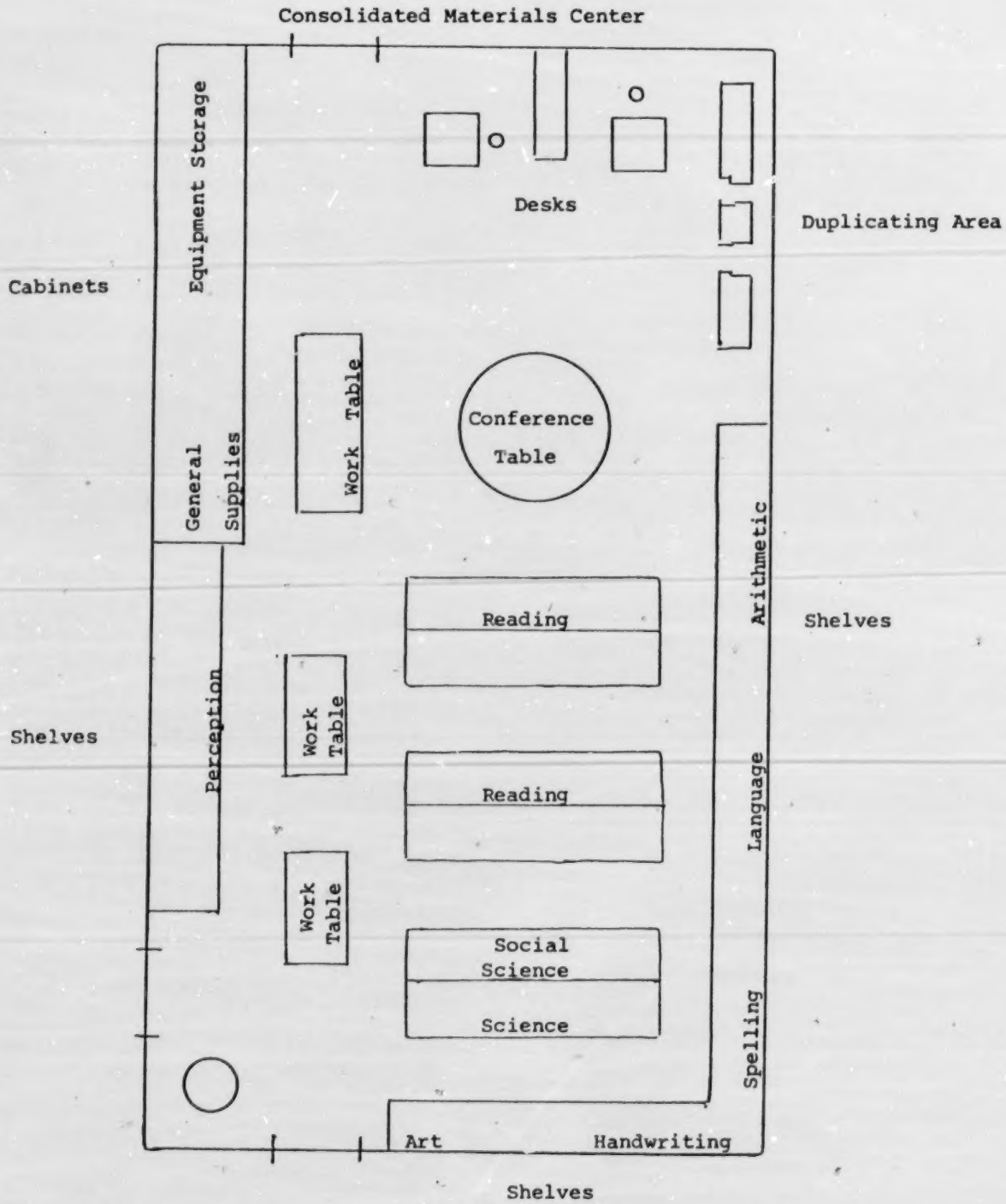
A center is not meant to replace or duplicate curriculum centers or libraries already in existance. Centers are designed to serve as a central point for the storage and distribution of the materials, games, books and equipment that are unique to special education or are the property and responsibility of special programs. An example of the physical organization of a center is provided in figure 6.

A consolidated center can be as simple an arrangement as two teachers combining their resources, providing some organization to their material and making systematic selection of appropriate materials for student use. At the same time, individualized packaged instruction can be implemented by a single teacher with an aide or a volunteer. Both of these procedures, while an improvement over many current practices, fall far short of the efficient and effective systems possible in most districts or units.

As the number of participating teachers increases, so does the resource base of the center. Materials bought in broken series by one teacher become a whole series when combined with the materials of others. Pooled purchasing power allows for more comprehensive selections. Duplications are diminished and high volume items are replaced as needed. In almost every way, the consolidated approach improves the teacher's resources.

Figure 6

ACCELERATED LEARNING



SUMMARY

The system of Accelerated Learning was designed to provide more effective instructional support for learning disabled students in regular classrooms. It is a system that is both practical and transportable. It allows school districts to achieve a maximum use of their materials, provides the support needed for resource teachers and assures the mainstreamed pupil of appropriate individualized instruction.